

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received

JUL 20 1982

date entered

**1. Name**historic The Mecklenburg Investment Company Building

and/or common

**2. Location**street & number 233 ~~South~~ Brevard Street not for publicationcity, town Charlotte vicinity of congressional district Ninthstate North Carolina code 037 county Mecklenburg code 119**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: None

**4. Owner of Property**

name John Crosland Company  
Attached Housing Division  
Robert W. Donaldson, Divisional Manager  
 street & number Post Office Box 11231

city, town Charlotte vicinity of state N. C. 28220**5. Location of Legal Description**courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Courthouse

street &amp; number

city, town Charlotte state North Carolina**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**title None has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ localdepository for survey records N/A

city, town state

## 7. Description

### Condition

☐ excellent  
☐ good  
☐ fair

☒ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☐ moved      date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Mecklenburg Investment Company Building, located at the southeast corner of South Brevard and East Third streets, is a handsome three-story red brick commercial building completed in 1922. At the time of its construction in 1922 the building was part of the greater architectural fabric making up the black community of Brooklyn; however, in recent years urban renewal in that section of Charlotte known as Second Ward has resulted in the massive demolition of large parts of the community. The Mecklenburg Investment Company Building, Grace, A.M.E. Zion Church, and several one-story brick buildings between are the only surviving elements of this once prosperous neighborhood which is now characterized by large modern office buildings, parking garages, and parking lots. The building is forty-two feet wide and ninety-eight feet deep.

No architect is associated with the building; however, the well-known black builder/contractor William W. Smith was hired by the investors to construct the Mecklenburg Investment Company Building. Smith had earlier constructed Grace A.M.E. Zion Church and was also the contractor for the A.M.E. Zion Publishing Company which stood nearby. This building and the publishing house were similar in design and construction, both being three stories in height and decorated with ornamental and patterned brickwork on their principal elevations. The symmetrical somewhat classical elevations are marked by a liveliness, vigor, and individual quality seen on few other buildings of its period in Charlotte.

The northwest front elevation laid in a buff colored brick with red brick trim has a three-bay division on all three floors with the first floor receiving the most architectural attention. The central entrance is set in a recessed arched opening between two large display windows. The second and third stories have identical arrangements with paired one over one sash windows in the outer bays and a trio of windows in the center bay.

These divisions are further defined and elaborated upon by a series of panels which occur vertically between the windows and other decorative brickwork which creates a rich tapestry effect on the elevation. The buff colored quoins framing the elevation rise to a free entablature consisting of a bold, rich bracketed architrave of layered projecting red bricks, a three part frieze featuring diamond patterns worked in red brick in the buff ground, and a shallow projecting red brick cornice.

The Third Street elevation of the building is laid up in the more usual red brick; however, it has a personality related to, yet distinct, from the front elevation. The rusticated ground story has an asymmetrical arrangement of openings including two large store fronts near the rear of the building, a door surmounted by a fanlight, three lunettes, and a medium sized display window at the front corner of the building. A row of patterned brick carry across the top of this story. The upper two stories of the building have a symmetrical eight part division. A cream colored band stretches across the facade at the top of the second story window openings. The rectangular panels which occurred on the front elevation between the second and third story windows appears here in a somewhat different treatment just as the entablature crowning the elevation differs slightly from its composition on the front elevation. The bold projecting architrave remains the same; however, the frieze has a four part division with the diamond patterns created by red brick in a red brick ground. The cornice is practically identical. The rear elevation has no opening on the first story, a window in the center of the second story, and a

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Black History

Specific dates 1922

Builder/Architect

William W. Smith

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Mecklenburg Investment Company Building, a handsome three-story brick commercial building at the corner of South Brevard and East Third streets, is a product of the "New Negro" movement of the twenties and a physical embodiment of the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance. The structure was built in the black community of Brooklyn in Charlotte's Second Ward by William W. Smith, a prominent black builder/contractor who was also responsible for the construction of the nearby Grace A.M.E. Zion Church and the A.M.E. Zion Publishing Company Building. This building and Grace Church still stand largely as they were built and are visual and architectural reminders of the skill, craftsmanship, and ambition of an emerging black generation. The black citizens who constructed and occupied the structure including Thad L. Tate and Dr. J. T. Williams, and the contractor Smith belonged to a new middle class of urban Negroes who emerged on a relatively large scale following World War I. In both its design and history the building reflects the important social, economic, and cultural changes in urban black society in the 1920s.

### Criteria Assessment:

- A. The Mecklenburg Investment Company Building is associated with the "New Negro" movement of the twenties and a physical embodiment of the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance. The rise of that black middle class sponsored a new black identity and in particular instances the construction of buildings and incorporation of concerns which demonstrated the skill and ambition of black businessmen and community leaders.
- B. The Mecklenburg Investment Company Building is associated with the lives of its founders and builder who occupied a pivotal role in the leadership of the black community of Brooklyn. Included in this group are: Caesar Robert Blake (1886-1931), president of the company; Thad L. Tate, treasurer of the company who was active in providing educational opportunities for blacks, and Dr. J. T. Williams who was a professional and political leader in the black community. The building is also associated with the life of William W. Smith (1873-1924) the contractor and the designer of the building who was also responsible for the construction of Grace A.M.E. Zion Church, also on South Brevard Street, and the A.M.E. Zion Publishing Company which stood nearby.
- C. While embodying the distinctive characteristics of commercial construction in the 1920s the Mecklenburg Investment Company Building has the important architectural significance of having been designed and constructed by a black builder/contractor, William W. Smith, who is known to have executed at least two other buildings in Brooklyn. Of the other two only Grace Church survives. While Smith's career has not been fully researched at this time, it can be said with assurance and with reference to Grace Church that the Mecklenburg Investment Company Building represents Smith's maturity as a designer and builder. It is also possible that the Mecklenburg Investment Company Building is the last major project he completed before his death in 1924.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Charlotte East

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UMT References

A 

1	7
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5	1	4	3	7	0
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3	8	9	7	5	7	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot at NE corner of jct S. Brevard Street and E. Third Street. Lot is approximately 40' x 90'. Mecklenburg County, Charlotte Tax Map Book 125, page 02. See attached map outlined in red.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
N/A		N/A	

state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Historical significance prepared by Joe A. Mobley and Dr. William H. Huffman (consultant), architectural description prepared by Davyd Foard Hood and Thomas Hanchett

organization Division of Archives and History date March 24, 1982

street & number 109 East Jones Street telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Raleigh state N. C. 27611

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☒ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*William S. Price, Jr.*

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date April 8, 1982

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date

8/19/82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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pair of windows symmetrically placed on the third story.

Next to the restrooms to the left of the central, lower stairway, is a side stairwell that winds in three flights to the top floor. The front bays of this story are a warren of eight rooms and a bath that were used as a doctor's office and still contain an old x-ray machine and a few instruments. This suite of rooms is the best finished of the rental spaces and retains its plain door surrounds and original (?) doors. Most of the floor, however, was given over to the meeting space for a Masonic Lodge. This area is the most interesting part of the interior of the building.

The lodge area is six-bays long and three-bays, the full width of the structure, wide. Except for the first three bays, which are divided into three small interconnected rooms by tongue-and-groove partitions, the area is one large assembly room. A beamed, coffered ceiling covers the meeting space and the three anterooms. Each beam is carried at the wall by a pilaster with a capital built up of wooden molding. The beams have applied molding detail. Each square coffer is composed of four triangular segments of double beaded tongue-and-groove panelling bordered by molding, with a turned pendant at the center of the coffer where the triangles meet. Large white glass globe lights are suspended from eight of these pendants to light the assembly room. In the daytime additional light comes from five windows in the southwest side wall, three in the north-east side wall, and two in the southeast rear wall. As on the second floor, none of the windows have surrounds.

The ground floor of the three-story Mecklenburg Investment Company Building is divided into three stores. Two face Brevard Street at the front of the building, while the third, at the back of the structure, faces the Third Street side. The commercial spaces do not appear to contain any decorative ornament or period fixtures of interest.

Between the Brevard Street shopfronts is a central door that opens on the stairway to the second floor. Climbing the stairs one is in a central hallway that runs the length of the structure parallel to Third Street, splitting to go around the stairwell. A wainscot of vertical tongue-and-groove beaded panelling protects the stairwell opening. Men's and women's restrooms are to the left of the stairwell. Doors open off the hallway, so that the investment company could rent one room or many depending on the needs of each particular tenant. The interior finish is very plain. Windows have no surrounds. A few rooms have chair rails, but most have no finish and most original doors have been replaced with hollow core ones.

The partition that separates the main room from the three anterooms is composed of alternating vertical panels of beaded and flush tongue-and-groove panelling, divided by vertical molding. It has a central double door flanked, not quite symmetrically, by two single doors. These single doors, each with a peephole cut in it, are handmade vertical panel mortise-and-tenon doors, probably salvaged from a nineteenth-century building. They contrast with the other doors on this floor, which contain horizontal panels and are machine produced.

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The lodge area is finished in white paint with a bold blue "wainscot" band along the lower fourth of the walls. There is a three-stepped half octagon podium at the center of the rear wall and a two-stepped rectangular one blocking the center double door at the front of the space. Both are built of plywood, of recent vintage, and appear to be movable. Five freestanding wardrobes still remain against the walls and are probably associated with the use of the room. There are also three corrins, including a simple handmade one with kerfed sides, which were used in lodge initiations.

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In May 1921 a number of Charlotte's leading black citizens formed the Mecklenburg Investment Company in Charlotte. They organized the firm in order to obtain sufficient money from black shareholders to build an office building in one of Charlotte's black neighborhoods known as Brooklyn. The founders of MIC intended to rent space in the building to black professionals and businessmen. Those who purchased stock in the company would share in the profits collected from the rents. The company soon purchased a lot on South Brevard Street in the central city, and the building was completed there in late 1922. The structure still stands as an architectural reminder of a significant period in the history of blacks in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The men who formed MIC and financed its office building were members of a new middle class of urban blacks that began appearing on a relatively large scale in the South and nation following World War I. The emergence of this new class of urban blacks in the 1920s was generally regarded as the "New Negro" movement. The blacks who composed the movement were educated, prosperous, race-proud, and self reliant. They stood in contrast to the more provincial and generally less educated rural blacks who predominated in the primarily-agricultural South after the Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to World War I the size of the black urban middle class had been extremely small. According to one authority, Howard Rabinowitz, urban blacks in the South at that time were part of three groups. At the top of the social and economic scale stood a small number of businessmen and professionals who had managed to accumulate wealth and property. "Below them," claims Rabinowitz, "was a modest-sized group of regularly employed hardworking petty tradesmen, artisans, and laborers who perhaps owned their homes and enjoyed some of the comforts of life." Both these categories composed the broadly-defined middle class of Southern Negroes. But the majority of city blacks before the war were "at the lowest levels of the economic ladder with little prospect of improvement."<sup>3</sup>

World War I coupled with black self-help and solidarity movements in the first two decades of the twentieth century changed to a significant extent this class structure among urban Negroes. The war contributed to the growth of white and black urbanization throughout the United States. Both during and after that conflict Southern blacks in large numbers migrated to Northern cities to find employment and to escape the racism of the South's white supremacy movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This northward migration led to the cultural and intellectual awakening known as the Harlem Renaissance in New York and other large cities in the North.<sup>4</sup> Smaller, but nevertheless significant, numbers of Negroes also left the countryside and took refuge in the industrializing cities and towns of the South for basically the same reason as their brethren fled north. Between 1900 and 1920 Charlotte's total population (white and black) increased from 18,091 to 46,338. Although census records do not give exact figures for the number of blacks in this population surge, it has been estimated that by the 1930s, blacks composed about 30 percent of Charlotte's inhabitants. New industry in the piedmont city, particularly textiles, drew many of the immigrants black as well as white.<sup>5</sup>

The Negroes who migrated to Charlotte settled generally in three neighborhoods. One of these communities, known as Biddleville, was located in West Charlotte near Biddle University (founded in 1867 and renamed Johnson C. Smith University in

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1923). A number of black intellectuals, faculty, and others associated with the university primarily populated this area. On the other side of the city adjacent to the affluent white neighborhood of Myers Park, another group of blacks formed the community of Cherry. The Negroes who lived in Cherry were for the most part domestic servants for the prosperous white residents of fashionable Myers Park. These white residents generally typified the rising upper middle class of the "New South" whose wealth came from the profits of the new industries appearing in Charlotte and other Southern metropolitan areas.<sup>6</sup>

The third black neighborhood which grew on a relatively large scale from 1900 to 1920 was called Brooklyn. Located in the central part of the city, it composed most of the second ward.<sup>7</sup> The largest number of Charlotte's Negroes probably settled here, for the census records indicate that the population of the primarily black second ward increased from 4,807 to 6,655 in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Brooklyn also became the main black commercial district in Charlotte--a fact which made it the preferred location for companies like the Mecklenburg Investment Company.<sup>8</sup>

As these black neighborhoods grew the numbers of black merchants, tradesmen, artisans, and professionals who served them also increased. Black schools and universities such as Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, Howard University in Washington, D.C., and Charlotte's own Johnson C. Smith University provided the leadership for the swelling black populations in Southern cities.<sup>9</sup>

Black self-help and solidarity movements were also important factors in shaping the rising black middle class and the growth of black neighborhoods. Perhaps more than any other Negro leader in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Booker T. Washington influenced the thinking and motivation of blacks in America. The black educator, reformer, and first president of Tuskegee Institute insisted that economic success was the key to a better future for Afro-Americans. Washington urged blacks to concentrate on the economic and moral improvement of their race and to forsake for the time being demands for social and political equality. He stressed self-help in the form of hard work, education (especially vocational education) and passivity to white supremacy. The founders of the Mecklenburg Investment Company and other middle class urban blacks were, for the most part, proponents of Washington's views. These middle class disciples of Booker T. Washington were regarded as the "talented tenth" of the Negro population, and they composed the largest parts of the memberships of such moderate black organizations as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.) established in 1910. In Charlotte's Brooklyn, as in other black communities, the teachings of Washington were kept paramount in the minds of black residents by the A.M.E. Zion Church. That denomination strongly supported the ideas of Tuskegee's president, and it publicized them by means of the A.M.E. Zion Quarterly, a church magazine edited by John C. Dancy, a prominent black political and intellectual leader from Tarboro, North Carolina.<sup>10</sup> Brooklyn's Grace A.M.E. Zion Church (ca. 1900-1902) was the chief voice for Washington's doctrine of self-help as well as a center of religious and social life for the inhabitants of the second ward.<sup>11</sup>

Faced with the realities of segregation and supported by Booker T. Washington's philosophy, most blacks after 1900 resigned themselves to achieving success within the confines of their own communities and institutions. As a general rule they abandoned



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efforts for securing political rights and full integration. Many hoped, however, that if they could prove themselves economically successful within their own communities, such as Charlotte's Brooklyn, then social and political privileges would be forthcoming from white society.

Furthermore, some urban blacks wanted to withdraw into their own commercial sphere in order to keep profits in the hands of black businessmen and to save Negroes from exploitation by white merchants, creditors, and landlords. Along with this idea of economic separation, urban blacks also developed a new awareness of their race's heritage stirred in part by the Harlem Renaissance with its emphasis on Afro-American literature and other cultural achievements. Johnson C. Smith University helped instill the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance in Charlotte's black neighborhoods. This new-found pride in being black led many urban Negroes, like those in the Queen City's second ward, to consciously and actively withdraw from white society that rejected them as equals.<sup>12</sup> Historian George Tindall has adequately summarized the position and attitude of most urban blacks in the South by the second decade of the twentieth century. "Out of their very separation," he writes, "American Negroes had painfully evolved a nascent sense of solidarity, self-help, and self-realization that issued into the New Negro Movement of the 1920s."<sup>13</sup>

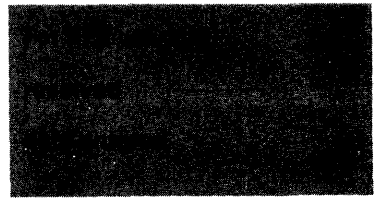
As mentioned previously, the men who formed the Mecklenburg Investment Company and financed its office building were typical of the "New Negroes" of the post World War I period. Their efforts were in keeping with the current black middle class philosophy of self-reliance as well as political, economic, and social separation. The new company consisted of a board of directors of twelve leading Charlotte blacks. The officers were C. R. Blake, Sr., president; A. E. Spears, vice-president; Thad L. Tate, treasurer; and Dr. A. J. Williams, a dentist, secretary. The new shareholders included black dentists, doctors, lawyers, and businessmen. Members of the faculty of Johnson C. Smith also held shares in the company.<sup>14</sup>

Two members of MIC who played a particularly strong role in establishing the firm and overseeing the construction of the building were treasurer Thad L. Tate and Dr. J. T. Williams, a black physician. Tate owned and operated the Uptown Barber Shop in Charlotte and was active in Negro civic affairs. He labored hard to improve conditions for the members of his race in the city and state. Through his own initiative and using his connections with white business and political leaders, including Governor Cameron Morrison, Tate helped establish the Brevard Street branch of the public library and a local branch of the YMCA for blacks in the Queen City. He was instrumental in founding the Morrison Training School for Negro youths in Hoffman, North Carolina, where a building is named in his honor.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. J. T. Williams, another member of the board of directors, was also a driving force in organizing MIC. Dr. Williams had a renowned reputation as an educator, physician, businessman, and public servant. In 1882 Williams became assistant principal of the Charlotte Graded School. He soon resigned from that position to study medicine. In 1886 Dr. Williams became one of the first three black physicians licensed to practice medicine in North Carolina. He subsequently established a successful surgical practice and a prosperous drug company. His public service included serving on the board of health of Mecklenburg County and being a member of the Charlotte board of aldermen in 1888 and 1890. In 1898 President William McKinley appointed him consul to Siena Leone in West Africa, a post he held until 1907. In 1921 in the same block that MIC building

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was subsequently erected, Dr. Williams constructed an elegant three-story house designed by Charlotte architect Louis Asbury (the building has since been demolished). J. T. Williams Junior High School in Charlotte is named for Dr. Williams.<sup>16</sup>

As a site for their new rental building, the members of MIC selected a South Brevard Street lot for sale by white owners Nancy Kerr Brown Young and her husband Dolph M. Young.<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Young had inherited the property from her father, Peter Marshall Brown, a prominent late nineteenth and early twentieth century businessman and owner of considerable downtown real estate in the Queen City. He was president of Trader's Land Company of Charlotte, and had served as mayor of that city in 1901-1905 and as chairman of the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners, 1896-1900.<sup>18</sup>

To construct the building, MIC hired black contractor William W. Smith, who also fitted the concept of the middle class "New Negro" of the twenties. Smith (1873-1924) began his career as a brickmason and eventually became an experienced designer and builder. As noted earlier he had constructed the Grace A.M.E. Zion Church which stood in the same block as the projected MIC building. Along with Thad L. Tate, Dr. J. T. Williams and a number of MIC shareholders, Smith was an active member of Grace Church.<sup>19</sup>

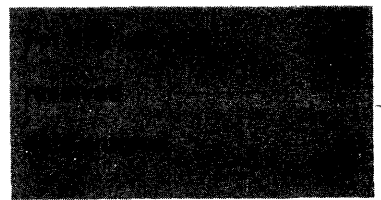
Because the building permit did not list an architect, it can be assumed that Smith designed the MIC building himself. He planned the structure to accommodate six stores on the first floor, sixteen offices on the second, and four offices and an assembly room on the third. The estimated cost totaled \$28,000. The design of the structure itself was indicative of the new trends taking place in urban black society after World War I. With its "formal classical composition" the building reflected a degree of commercial and cultural sophistication that was the hallmark of the rising black middle class and the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>20</sup>

Close-by to the new MIC office center, already stood still another edifice of the period, planned and constructed by William W. Smith. This was the A.M.E. Zion Publishing Company headquarters (now demolished) which had architectural features similar to the MIC building, including the facade of stone and brick veneer and the three story plan. These two commercial buildings along with the Grace Church, the public library, and other smaller commercial and residential structures gave the Brooklyn neighborhood a small-scaled, but nonetheless bustling, metropolitan air.<sup>21</sup>

After the MIC Building was completed in late 1922 a number of black dentists (including Dr. A. J. Williams, the first MIC secretary), lawyers, and other professionals and businessmen moved in. These tenants had been scattered in various parts of the city, often in unsuitable quarters. For some forty years the MIC building continued to be a center for black business and professional activity in Charlotte. Among the commercial firms operating out of the facility at various times, was Yancy's Drug Store located in a corner shop, followed by a popular restaurant, the Savoy Inn. The structure was also a type of community center where black fraternal organizations met and social functions and entertainment were held. A number of black Masonic lodges began and continued to hold sessions in the third-floor meeting room. Social clubs also met there and Brooklyn residents frequently danced to the music of band leaders like Jimmy Gunn and his band. (Gunn was also a high school principal for whom J. H. Gunn school is named.)<sup>22</sup>

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The MIC venture proved so successful that the mortgage was retired in less than ten years and thus was not a liability during the Great Depression of the 1930s.<sup>23</sup> That period did, however, see an increase in the number of poorer Negroes and slum homes in the second ward. The poorer section of Brooklyn was known as Blue Heaven and was located in that part of the ward which was several blocks east of South Brevard Street.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the economic setbacks of the depression years, the black neighborhood of Brooklyn survived, and the MIC Building remained at the center of commercial and social life in the second ward.

Civil rights legislation and judicial decisions of the 1950s and 1960s led to improved conditions for black Americans, and the people of Charlotte's second ward shared in the resulting benefits. Charlotte, in fact, was one of the state's first cities to begin efforts to integrate. Shortly after World War II the city ended segregated seating on city buses. When the new auditorium and coliseum were completed in the mid-1950s, they opened on a non-segregated basis. Also during the fifties the city desegregated its public libraries and parks and hired a number of black policemen.

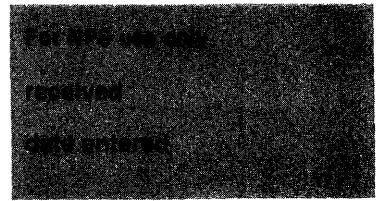
In 1960 students from Johnson C. Smith organized Charlotte's first sustained desegregation demonstrations in protest against segregated downtown lunch counters.<sup>25</sup> Further civil rights demonstrations and subsequent laws brought more equal conditions for blacks in the Queen City and throughout the South. Members of MIC were active in the civil rights movement. As their lot improved many Charlotte blacks managed to leave their old segregated neighborhoods and join the general flight of blacks and whites from downtown to suburban areas. A number of these blacks moved to west Charlotte. Because integration enabled black professionals and businessmen to locate in newer offices and stores, tenancy in the MIC Building declined, although the company still owns the structure.<sup>26</sup>

Along with the general exodus from the inner city, buildings in the Second Ward continued to deteriorate. Recently urban renewal projects have demolished most of the residential and commercial structures in the Brooklyn neighborhood. With their demolition a view of part of the history of blacks in North Carolina also disappeared. Only the MIC Building still stands as a visual testimony to that era when an urban middle class of blacks arose in Charlotte and led the city's Afro-Americans in taking a giant step forward.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Charlotte Observer, May 2, 1922; Interview of Dr. William H. Huffman with Amelia Tate Henderson, Charlotte, North Carolina, May 15, 1981, hereinafter cited as Henderson interview.

<sup>2</sup>August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915; Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963), 256-260; see also Alan Locke (ed.), The New Negro: An Interpretation (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), passim.

<sup>3</sup>Howard N. Rabinowitz, Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 95-96.

<sup>4</sup>Edgar A. Toppin, A Biographical History of Blacks in America Since 1528 (New York: David McKay, Inc., 1971), 179, 185; Meier, Negro Thought in America, 256-260.

<sup>5</sup>Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920: Population (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 266, hereinafter cited as Census, 1920: Population; The Writers Project of the Works Project Administration, Charlotte: A Guide to the Queen City of North Carolina (Charlotte: Hornet's Nest Post, No. 9, American Legion, 1939), 10.

<sup>6</sup>Writers Project, Charlotte, 10, 35; William S. Powell, Higher Education in North Carolina (Raleigh: Department of Archives and History, 1964), 25; Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 506-509, 512-513.

<sup>7</sup>Office of City Engineer, Charlotte, N.C., "Official Map of Charlotte, N.C.," April 1, 1948, copy in map collection, Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>8</sup>Census, 1920: Population, 269.

<sup>9</sup>George Brown Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 272-274.

<sup>10</sup>Meier, Negro Thought in America, 252, 256-278.

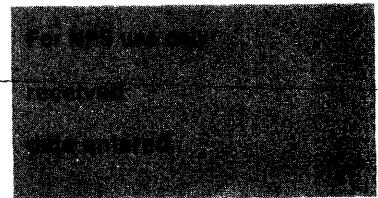
<sup>11</sup>William H. Huffman, "A Brief History of the Grace A.M.E. Zion Church," an unpublished manuscript in the possession of William H. Huffman, 1.

<sup>12</sup>Toppin, A Biographical History of Blacks, 177-179; Meier, Negro Thought in America, 250-259, 270-271.

<sup>13</sup>George Brown Tindall in a review of August Meier's Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915 in Journal of Southern History, XXX (May, 1964), 237.

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<sup>14</sup>Records of Incorporation, North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State, Raleigh, North Carolina; Interview of William H. Huffman with Ray Booton, President of the Mecklenburg Investment Company, Charlotte, North Carolina, May 26, 1981, hereinafter cited as Booton interview.

<sup>15</sup>Charlotte Observer, March 30, 31, 1951; Henderson interview.

<sup>16</sup>Charlotte Observer, June 9, 1924; Building Permit, June 14, 1921, City Hall, Charlotte, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Building Permit, June 14, 1921.

<sup>17</sup>Mecklenburg County Deed Books, Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Charlotte, North Carolina, Deed Book 454, p. 21; hereinafter cited as Mecklenburg Deed Book; Interview of William H. Huffman with Dolph Young, Charlotte, North Carolina, September 15, 1981, hereinafter cited as Young interview. Part of the compensation was shares in MIC.

<sup>18</sup>Mecklenburg Deed Book 345, p. 8; Young interview; Mecklenburg County Will Books, Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Charlotte, North Carolina, Will Book Q, 323; Mecklenburg County Death Certificates, Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Charlotte, North Carolina, Book 2, p. 934.

<sup>19</sup>Huffman, "A Brief History of the Grace A.M.E. Zion Church," 1.

<sup>20</sup>Building Permit, June 14, 1921.

<sup>21</sup>Jack O. Boyte, "M.I. Co. Building, 1922," an unpublished manuscript at Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1-2.

<sup>22</sup>John Vaughan, "On Our Street," Charlotte News, July 25, 1980.

<sup>23</sup>Booton interview.

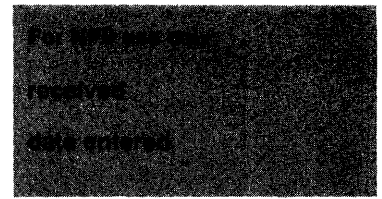
<sup>24</sup>Writer's Project, Charlotte, 10.

<sup>25</sup>Copus W. Waynick, John C. Brooks, Elsie W. Pitts (eds.), North Carolina and the Negro (Raleigh: North Carolina Mayor's Co-operating Committee, 1964), 52, 54.

<sup>26</sup>Vaughn, "On Our Street;" Booton interview.

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